

# **The History of Lorton Virginia,**

## **By Susan Annie Plaskett**

Many people have asked about the origin of Lorton, so this is its history.

Joseph Plaskett brought his family to America in 1853, and settled in Virginia. He farmed until after the War between the States, when his family being grown, and interested in making their own homes, he left the farm and opened a cross roads country store. The location was just off the present Number One Highway where it crosses the Lorton-Gunston road. Seeing the need of a post office in the community, since the nearest one was at Accotink Hills, he applied to the Post Office Department to locate one in his store. Colonel Edward Daniels had bought Gunston Hall from the Mason heirs and was living in the Mansion at that time. Being a friend of President Grant he used his influence in having the post office established.

Joseph Plaskett in naming the post office thought of his home in Cumberland County, England, and called it Laurel Valley. It was opened for service November 11, 1875. The new post office was one mile from the railroad and Telegraph Station. In the early 1870's a railroad had been constructed between Washington, D.C. and Quantico to connect with the old Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. Service prior to that time had been by boat down the Potomac River. Where the new railroad crossed the old "Telegraph Road" a station had been build and called Telegraph Station.

The first local train service was a combined passenger and freight, that made 3 round trips a week. The pouch of mail was carried from the Lorton Valley post office, delivered to the trainman, and the incoming mail would be carried back. There was no device for exchanging mail with moving trains as there is today. If the train did not have to stop, the pouch would have to be thrown into the baggage car doorway. Sometimes the thrower's aim would be poor, and then the mail would be delayed until the next trip. As the train service improved and the mail increased, the trips from and to the post office

were changed to daily, and then twice daily. At present time mail is delivered by truck to the various post offices.

In the early 1880's Mr. Joseph M. Springman opened a general merchandise store near "Telegraph Station." He was the first station agent at that place, and when a post office was established there he was appointed as the first postmaster. The office was named "Springman" and "Telegraph Station" was changed to "Springman". A few years later the names of both the post office and the station were changed to Lorton.

In the meantime, a post office had been established near Gunston Wharf, on the Potomac River, which was served by the steamer "Harry Randall" from Washington, "Star Route" was later established from Lorton via Lorton Valley to Gunston. When R.F.D. service went into effect, the two latter post offices were discontinued, and since then service has been by carrier from Lorton. When Lorton Valley post office was discontinued June 2, 1911, it had been in existence 36 years and had the unique distinction of being served by only one family, but in three generations.

When the stamp, commemorating the 200 anniversary of Gunston Hall went on sale at Lorton Post Office, June 12, 1958, it was interesting to remember that when Lorton Valley Post Office was established 85 years before, it was through the help and cooperation of one who was then living at Gunston Hall. Thus on both occasions the two seemed to be linked together.

In 1955, 102 years after Joseph Plaskett came to America, the author and her two sisters (daughters of Joseph's eldest son, John) went to England and visited many of the interesting places of which they had heard so much. The little village of High Lorton in Cumberland County, from which the Virginia Lorton was named, is off the beaten path and so unspoiled by tourists. It is a picturesque place with two or three winding streets and stone houses, one of which has the date 1678, over the door. Double-deck buses go thru the town on the way from Keswick to Cockermouth, Caryport, and other places. There is a post office, a garage, and the Horse Shoe Inn. To take a short cut to St.

Cuthbert's Church, one crosses a meadow dotted with daisies and other wild flowers. Some of the tombstones in the old graveyard are centuries old.

As High Lorton is located in the heart of the Lake District, it is surrounded by beautiful scenery. The River Whitby flows thru the little village. Back of the village is an ancient yew tree. Wordsworth, in one of his poems call is "The Pride of Lorton's Vale."

A mile from High Lorton is Low Lorton where Lorton Hall is located. One of the town's wealthiest citizens once resided there. (Account written in 1958)